

My name is Kenniece Coker, and I am from Stamford, CT. I am a student at the University of Connecticut, where I am an individualized major, studying community health and wellness with a minor in Chinese. I am also a student in the fast-track master's in public health.

Throughout high school, I always had the dream of going to college. At a young age, I acknowledged that going to college was a privilege, considering the financial burden and how daunting it is. Upon getting accepted to UConn, I received notice about the Student Support Services program, also known as SSS, and my acceptance being contingent on my completion of a five-week summer program. At first, I was discouraged, but after knowing what I know now about the SSS program, I am confident that my college experience thus far would not have been the same without it. To be a part of a support program geared toward students who, like myself, are low-income, nontraditional, and/or first-generation to college is reassuring. Aside from the program's academic, financial, and personal support, this program, and UConn has provided me compassion, empowerment, and an amazing community, which I argue is just as important as the academic aspect. In my freshman year, I declared myself an independent student, and at that vulnerable time, I received emotional support from my SSS counselor, who connected me with other support resources such as Financial Aid and Student Health and Wellness, who patiently helped me navigate this challenge. Receiving the collective support from programs and departments here at UConn allowed me to continue my education [here](#) [CC1].

I am proud to say that every ounce of support I received was a starting point for my future. Since then, I have been active in Community Outreach at UConn, where I have a leadership position for Alternative Breaks, serve as the president of the Voice of Freedom gospel choir, as well as a BOLD Women Leadership Network Scholar where I researched the need and how we can support young mothers on a societal and institutional level. I truly believe that we can only receive what we give. In UConn giving me a chance at pursuing my education, I was able to pour out the support back into the UConn and greater community.

This is why funding is crucial to universities: to support students like me. I am one of many students who demonstrate that the state's investment in UConn is working, and with continued funding, future generations of UConn students, including those who are independent, first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented, will have the opportunity to graduate from UConn and pour back into our communities throughout the state. These initiatives invest in students like me and should not receive a cutback. Thank you for your past support of UConn and I ask you to continue to consider us when reviewing the budget.